

Rational Use of Emergency Contraceptives

There are millions of unplanned, and often unwanted, pregnancies every year despite the availability of highly effective methods of contraception or due to contraception failure. Although effective Contraception is readily available, there are times when a safe and emergency method for birth control is required, especially in situations when a condom breaks or a woman forgets to take her birth control pills or if a diaphragm or cervical cap slips out of place during intercourse and after a sexual assault.

Emergency Contraception (EC), as the name suggests, is a method of birth control that you can use to keep from getting pregnant if you have unprotected intercourse. These are also known as the 'morning after pill', or 'post-coital contraception'; but the term 'emergency contraception' is most suitable as this method is to be used by women within a few hours to a few days of unprotected intercourse and not just the next morning.

Studies indicate that emergency contraceptive pills are 75% effective in preventing pregnancies if taken within the first 72 hours of unprotected intercourse. Emergency Contraception pills are most effective when used as soon as possible after having unprotected sex.

It should be noted that overall emergency contraception methods are less effective than regular contraceptive methods like contraception pills or diaphragms. So, emergency contraception should not be used as your regular method of contraception.

It is very important to understand that one should try and take the pill within 24 hours of unprotected sex. But if the implantation has taken place, then the pill wouldn't be effective. But efficacy of emergency contraceptive pills is less than regular contraceptives. And the failure rates keep adding, thereby increasing the chances of future pregnancies.

To know more details regarding how ECs work, the Dos and Don'ts and the risks associated with misuse/abuse of these pills, read the online version of **Emergency Contraception and Brief Update on Regular Contraception. Guide Book for Health-Care Providers, authored by Dr. Suneeta Mittal, Director-in-Charge WHO-CCR in Human Reproduction, AIIMS** available at www.indianwomenshealth.com

The specified section on Emergency Contraceptives is available at
<http://www.indianwomenshealth.com/Emergency-Contraception-306.aspx>